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ABSTRACT

Students can learn the value of public service by participating in service learning projects. Through a service learning component, students gain a personal understanding of the public sector and experience with current public issues. In this study students and teachers were assisted by service coordinators who arranged for students to experience different fields of work. At first students were not eager to participate, but once involved, they became enthusiastic. This involvement achieved positive results as students gained a broad understanding about public issues and valuable experience. Many students offered more of their time than was required. Overall, students attained important personal growth from their experiences. (JAG)

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COMBINING COMMUNITY SERVICE AND THE STUDY OF AMERICAN PUBLIC POLICY

by

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On the first day of class of spring semester 1995 at Providence College, students in both sections of my course: PSC 406 - *American Public Policy* discovered something unexpected as they perused the course syllabus. To the surprise of most, they learned that the course would require that they spend, at least, two hours each week performing community service at one of four different community agencies. The service would not be an option, but a course requirement just like the term paper and the reading assignments also described in the syllabus. In this course, they learned, service would be integrated as a key component of the academic work undertaken during the semester. The syllabus implied that their hours of community service would be as important in their learning about public policy as the readings, class discussions, lectures, and written assignments that they would experience during the semester. For most of the students, this syllabus was their first encounter with one of the fastest growing pedagogical trends in American higher education - service-learning.

Although the movement has old philosophical roots, only in the last decade has the integration of community service into the academic curriculum begun to establish itself at colleges and universities throughout the country.[1] The movement is a part of a national renewal of interest in community service, as represented by President Clinton's *Americorps* program and the broader campus community service movement. While identifying with these larger movements, advocates of service-learning pedagogy make distinctive educational arguments to justify integrating service into the curriculum. First, they argue that service-learning, like other forms of

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[1]A number of recent publications offer an overview of the history and philosophy of service-learning: Tamar Y. Kupiec, *Rethinking Tradition: Integrating Service with Academic Study on College Campuses* (Providence, RI: Campus Compact, 1993; Jane Kendall et. al, *Combining Service And Learning: A Resource Book for Community and Public Service, Vol I - III* (Raleigh, NC: National Society for Experiential Education, 1990).

experiential education, balances the predominant "information-assimilation model" inherent in the conventional lecture/discussion format with a "bottoms-up" approach that connects the classroom and academic content to "real life."[2] Second, proponents see service-learning as a mechanism for promoting students' personal growth and value development.[3] Finally, a point of special interest to political scientists, service-learning is viewed as an effective form of civic education.[4]

For many teachers, these arguments form a compelling case for creating service-components in their courses. I confess to being such a teacher. Last year, as I planned to teach, for the twentieth time, my public policy course, I decided to include a service component. This paper is a report on my experience. It documents the impact service-learning had on the course at all stages from the formulation of course goals and syllabus through impact on student performance and attitudes. My purpose is to provide those political science colleagues who are intrigued by service-learning and considering introducing it into their courses a detailed course case history of the experience of one political scientist with service-learning. I hope my experience might be helpful to colleagues as they take the plunge into the world of service-learning.

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[2] Greg Markus, "Integrating Service-learning into a Course in Contemporary Political Issues", in Jeffrey Howard (ed.), *Praxis: A Faculty Casebook on Community Service Learning* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: OCSL Press, 1993), p. 58.

[3]Cecilia I. Delve, Suzanne D. Mintz, Greig M. Stewart, "Promoting Values Development Through Community Service: A Design", Delve et. al. (eds.) *Community Service as Values Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Boss, 1990), pp 7 - 30.

[4]Benjamin Barber and Richard Battistoni, "A Season of Service: Introducing Service-learning Into the Liberal Arts Curriculum," *PS: Political Science and Politics* June 1993, pp. 235-240.

Why Service-learning in *American Public Policy*?

My course PSC 406 - *American Public Policy* is one of the oldest in my teaching repertoire. Over the years, it has undergone a variety of permutations and service-learning is not the first pedagogical innovation I have tried in it. But, despite the course's changes and evolution over the past twenty years, its basic goals and objectives have been constant. My central goal in the course is to develop students' capacities as "citizen policy analysts" - their ability to form critical analytic judgements about public policy arguments and proposals that they must evaluate as democratic citizens. The course emphasizes description and historical analysis over introducing sophisticated (and often arcane) analytic models and methods. In my view, making judgments about existing public policies and proposals for change requires, most of all, an understanding of the historical experience in addressing the public problems at which policies are aimed. This understanding includes knowing how the nature of the American political economy and the particular development of the American positive state shape and constrain all public policy. The first few weeks of my course always focus on political economy and the growth of the state as a prelude to in depth study of a handful of specific policy areas. Analysis of specific policies aims at illustrating each of their links to broader problems in the evolution of the political economy and state development.

The particular policies studied in the course vary from year to year. Three factors govern which policies are chosen: first, because we have a course on American foreign policy, I select only "domestic" policy issues - although the line between them is often blurred; second, I pick policy areas about which I have, at least, some expertise; and, third, I try to choose issues for a given semester that are topical and in the news at the moment. Because I pick issues that are "in

the news", my practice the last few years has been to assign the *New York Times* as required reading. Choosing topical issues allows analyzing the day to day discourse in the media in relation to broader forces in American politics. This semester I chose welfare, immigration, education, and crime as specific policy areas.

As I try to do each year, I assigned a variety of required readings offering a range of theoretical sophistication. This year, on the more theoretical end of the range was Piven and Cloward's *Regulating The Poor*, on the more descriptive end Kozol's *Savage Inequalities*[5]. These were supplemented with a variety of articles from journals of opinion like *The American Prospect, Policy Review, Atlantic Monthly, The Public Interest, Dissent,* etc.

My goal for the community service component of the course, in light of my course goals and decisions about topics and readings, was to put students in contact with the consequences of public policy. I wanted them to encounter and, perhaps even, get to know people directly affected by the policies we would be studying. In my initial discussions with the College's service-learning coordinator, we explored what service sites and types of service would allow for encounters with welfare recipients and other people who might be affected by the Republican leadership's Contract With America, with recent immigrants, with urban school children, and with crime victims or those accused of crimes. Encounters with these people, I hoped, would provide a different perspective on public policy by "putting a face" on public policies and their consequences. It was unlikely that service sites corresponding to all policy areas discussed in class would be found, but our objective was to identify sites that would bring students in contact

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[5]Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (New York: Vintage, 1993); Jonathan Kozol *Savage Inequalities: Children In America's Schools* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991).

with at least some of the policy areas to be discussed in class.

In the end, four service site options were presented to students. Students could work in a Providence homeless shelter, Amos House, serving either a lunch or breakfast once a week. The second option was tutoring sixth through eighth grade students at an urban middle school, Ezek Hopkins, located near the campus. The third alternative was working with Southeast Asian immigrant children in an after school program sponsored by a the Southeast Asian Development Corporation, a self-help civic group organized by recent immigrants. Finally, several students would work an a project for the Community Affairs Vicariate of Providence's Roman Catholic Diocese to interview welfare recipients and prepare anonymous case profiles that could be used in parish education on the welfare reform issue. Students would be given these options on the first day of class and asked to commit at least two hours per week to one of them.

Integrating service-learning into college courses requires attention to two important aspects of course development: (1) how to compensate for the additional student time and effort service requires and (2) how service will be factored into the evaluation of student performance. I believe thinking about the service requirement as analogous to other sorts of requirements, like assigned papers or readings, helps in addressing both of these issues. Requiring two or more hours of community service a week needs to be taken into account in light of the overall course requirements, just as one must do in assigning an additional paper or book to read. In the public policy course, I could not simply add the service requirement on top of the quantity and type of assignments made previously. In this case, I decided to alter the course paper requirement to take into account the time taken up with service. Instead of a traditional research paper, I required students to write an analytic essay, without additional research beyond assigned course readings,

on what they learned about public policy from their service experience. Students were required, also, to keep a weekly journal of their service experience that could served as "data" for this paper.

The appropriate way to evaluate service and integrate it into the course grade seems to be a major concern for many service-learning practitioners.[6] My own view, one that reflects many discussions of this issue with my Providence College colleagues, is that we should concentrate on evaluating the "learning" side of service-learning and not the "service". The performance goal of service-learning is not how well a student *serves*, whether defined as how caring, how efficient, or how enthusiastically, but how well a student *learns* from the service experience. (This approach is analogous to how I evaluate a student reading assignment - not by how well a student reads (speed readers get no extra points) but the learning that results from a particular book or article.) Students are graded, not on the service per se, but on their reflections on that service and their ability to relate it to the subject matter of the course. In the public policy course, student journals and papers were the means by which I could judge what students had learned about public policy from their service. The service activity, itself, was evaluated only through monitoring whether students kept their service commitment and adhered to the basic rules of their service site. (Much as one might monitor class attendance or require submission of a paper by a certain date.) No attempt was made to judge whether they were effective food servers, tutors, mentors, or interviewers - the basic assumption was that the service commitment included trying to do one's best. I was careful to make clear in both the course syllabus and my first day introduction of the

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[6] Urban Whitaker "Assessing Learning" in Jane Kendall et.al. (Eds.) *Combining Service and Learning - Vol. II* (Raleigh, NC: National Society for Internships and Experiential Education, 1990, pp. 206-208.

service component that student reflections on their service experience and how these were related to public policy issues would provide the basis for the course grade.

The classroom portion of the course followed a conventional lecture/discussion format with discussion predominating over the lecture portion. After the first couple of weeks when I introduce basic concepts and the political economy context of American public policy, class sessions generally involved discussion around key questions or issues that I framed during the first five or ten minutes of class. The final course grades, in addition to the service journal and analytic paper, were based on a midterm and final exams plus class participation. Also, students from each of the four service sites made group presentations to the rest of the class at the end of the semester.

One advantage I had in organizing the service component of my course was the help of the staff of Providence College's Feinstein Institute for Public Service. Established in 1993 through a grant from a Rhode Island philanthropist, the Feinstein Institute promotes the integration of community service learning into the College's academic curriculum. Along with the administration of a new academic degree program in Public and Community Service Studies, the Feinstein Institute staff offer support to faculty, like me, who want to integrate community service activities into their classes. A service-learning coordinator works with faculty in selecting appropriate service sites and in making contacts with staff of community organizations in setting up the service experiences. Already, in just the past year, the Institute has established numerous community contacts that greatly facilitate identifying appropriate community service placements. An important aspect of this process is matching service sites with the particular goals of different courses. In planning the service sites for my course, I met several times with the service-learning

coordinator to discuss my course goals and review alternative sites. In addition, as a part of the new academic degree program, majors in Public and Community Service Studies are available to faculty as teaching assistants to help in organizing and coordinating the service components of courses. Throughout the course of the semester, Institute staff keep track of service-learning classes and provide assistance for any problems that develop. At semester's end, the Institute evaluates the service components of all service-learning classes.

I found the assistance of Institute staff essential in designing and adding a service component to my public policy course. Early discussion with the service-learning coordinator allowed me to evaluate alternative service sites and select those most appropriate for my teaching objectives. Without this assistance, selecting service sites would have consumed much of my time and would not have permitted consideration of as many alternatives. While few institutions are likely to have staff support for service-learning as extensive as we do at PC, many now have offices of student community service or, even, service-learning coordination, that are critical resources for introducing service-learning. Political science faculty should take advantage of the experience and knowledge of any community service staff at their institutions rather than attempting the complex task of arranging service sites on their own.

The Service Experience

Most of the students who enrolled in my public policy class did not know before the first day of class that community service would be required and many were not happy about the requirement when they learned of it. In fact, based on comments during the first class, I estimated that about one third of the students were hostile the idea of service, one third indifferent

- although somewhat intrigued, and the remaining third excited about the idea. Those opposed to the service requirement were concerned primarily about the time commitment and fitting another two hour obligation into their school and work schedules. Some accused me of being unfair in not advertizing the service requirement before course registration. My response was to point out that those opposed to service were free to drop the course and that course requirements, like papers or specific reading assignments, are rarely advertized at course registration time. Beyond these comments, however, I tried during this first class to explain my rationale for including the service component and how it fit into course goals. By the end of the hour, I seem to have succeeded in converting most of those initially hostile to the service component as all but three students remained in the course.

Besides presenting the rationale for the service, each of the four service options were presented to the students on the first day of class. They were asked to rank order their preferences and final service assignments were made by the end of the week. In most cases, the distribution of preferences allowed giving students their first choice. During the second week of classes, students attended a general service orientation at the Feinstein Institute and had an on-site orientation conducted by course teaching assistants and service site staff. Service schedules were worked out for each students and all began their service by week three.

These were the students service options:

Ezek Hopkins Middle School

> An urban school for sixth through eighth grades, Ezek Hopkins has a diverse student body reflecting the overall characteristics of the Providence school system. Two-thirds of all the students are minority including a large Hispanic and Southeast Asian immigrant population. Seventy-five per cent of the students qualify for free or reduced school lunch indicating family income below the

poverty line. Student service involved tutoring students in math for one hour twice a week. In most cases, public policy students were paired with children with whom they worked for the entire semester. Tutors picked up their pupils in the classroom and took them to the school library or cafeteria for individual instruction.

Community Affairs Vicariate of the Roman Catholic Diocese

Students worked with the Parish Education unit in developing case profiles of welfare recipients that staff would use in communicating with parishioners on welfare reform issues. Students worked with staff in developing an interview protocol and devising procedures to assure respondent confidentiality and the voluntary character of their participation. After protocol and procedures developed, students conducted one or two interviews per week at two diocesan social service agencies and wrote profiles. Parish education staff will use anecdotes from the profiles to put a "human face" on the welfare issue so people can understand the reasons people resort to welfare and the problems they face in their lives.

Amos House

Located in Providence's poorest neighborhood, Amos House is a homeless shelter and soup kitchen. Run by a activist staff of homeless advocates, some of whom were formerly homeless themselves, the shelter serves hundreds of meals each day. Students assisted in preparing and serving either breakfast or lunch once a week. Most students in the class opted to serve breakfast beginning a 6 AM.

Southeast Asian Economic Development Center

This service involved mentoring ethnically Cambodian, Laotian, and Vietnamese children involved in the Southeast Asian Economic Development Center's (SEDC) after school program. Children were bused to Providence College several times each week. Students helped the children with homework, talked, and played games with them.

The service experience proved to be one of the most popular aspects of the course - despite the early misgivings of some students. Within a couple of weeks of beginning their service, I heard enthusiastic comments from students about their service. Early student worries that they would not have time for community service eased once the two hour commitment

became part of their weekly routine. One health services management major, for example, who wanted me to waive the service because of the time demands of her health management internship, soon became so enthusiastic about tutoring children at Ezek Hopkins that she began volunteering extra hours. By the middle of the semester, her service experience had led her to re-orient her health services internship around devising a middle school anti-smoking curriculum. Another student, who had insisted on a Saturday service placement because of his busy work schedule, was soon showing up at Amos House both at his regular Saturday time and for one other breakfast during the week. By the end of the semester, many students said, in their course evaluations and journals, that the service experience was one of the most valuable aspect of the course.

The service experience in my course seemed consistent with the anecdotal accounts in the service-learning literature: students find service meaningful, worthwhile, and appreciate its integration into the course. Most described service as a learning experience in itself - a means of contact with people and new experiences that they had not previously encountered. In their journal entries, students frequently mentioned how the service experience increased their awareness of social concerns and the life experience of those they met in their service. The service experience also seemed an opportunity for many for personal growth and the development of their own self confidence. Many of the tutors at Ezek Hopkins, for example, were surprised to learn, despite initial insecurity about their own math skills, that they knew enough to help the middle school students; several remarked that they "remembered" more basic math than they had expected. The students who interviewed AFDC recipients gained confidence in their ability to conduct interviews and, what several found most important, their ability to deal emotionally with

the sometimes traumatic stories they heard. And, as has been my experience in previous service-learning classes, students found their service personally satisfying. Comments about "making a real difference" appeared in nearly every service journal.

That students found the service experience worthwhile, educational, and satisfying is clear, but what impact did it have on their learning about public policy and what impact on their beliefs and values? In the next two sections, I will address this question which raises the most important claims of the service-learning movement.

Impact of Service-learning on Attitude and Value Change

Service-learning promises to enhance students' personal moral development and their capacities as democratic citizen. In spite of the frequency of claims about the impact of community service on changes in student values and attitudes, we have very few studies documenting these effects. Many of us would hope that service-learning would contribute to more mature student expectations about their own lives, their relationship to others, and their civic responsibilities, but only a few researchers have studied this issue. Recently, two well-crafted studies have documented the impact service-learning can have on student values and attitudes. In one, Judith Boss employed an experimental design in two sections of her ethics course to test the hypothesis that community service would improve students' moral reasoning. She found that changes in scores on pre- and post-tests of moral reasoning were significantly higher in the experimental section involved in service-learning than in the control section.[7] In a

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[7]Judith Boss, "The Effect of Community Service Work on the Moral Development of College Ethics Students", *Journal of Moral Education*, Vol. 23, No.2, 1994.

similar experimental study of two sections of a political science course at the University of Michigan, Gregory Markus, Jeffrey Howard, and David King found that service-learning had a significant impact on changes in student personal values and orientations on several measures.[1]

I had initially hoped to replicate the Markus et. al. study in my public policy course using their same questionnaire of belief and value orientations and a similar experimental design. Unfortunately, enrollments in the two sections of *American Public Policy* turned out very uneven as most students avoided an early morning section (only seven students) in favor of the one offered later in the day (enrollment twenty-five). In view of these skewed enrollments and the overall small enrollment, I opted to require service in both public policy sections and attempt, instead, a quasi-experimental design using my European politics course as a control group. The Markus et. al. survey was administered to students in both sections of public policy and the one section of European politics with thirty-two completed pre and post surveys from public policy students involved in required service and nineteen completed surveys from European politics students. The University of Michigan survey questions included items to measure orientations toward personal life goals, obligations to society and others, and civic responsibility. While this design did not isolate the potential impact of service-learning as elegantly as in the Boss and Markus et. al. studies, I hoped that large differences between students in two of my own classes, even with the different subject matter, might support an interpretation that service-learning makes a difference. The study hypothesis was that, at the end of the semester, the public policy students' mean scores on the survey items would be significantly higher in the direction of concern for

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[1]Gregory B. Markus, Jeffrey P.F. Howard, and David King, "Integrating Community Service and a Classroom Instruction Enhances Learning: Results From an Experiment" *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, Vol. 15, No.4, Winter 1993, pp. 410-419.

others and civic commitment than at the beginning of the course and that more significant change would be found in the public policy class than in the European politics course.

TABLE I: *Public Policy Pre- and Post-course Mean Score Change in Beliefs and Values*[9]

Belief or Value	Pre-test mean	Post-test mean
Indicate the importance to you personally of the following:		
a. working toward equal opportunity for all U. S. citizens.	3.2	3.3
b. developing a meaningful philosophy of life.	3.0	3.2
c. becoming involved in a program to improve my community.	2.9	3.1
d. being very well off financially.	2.6	2.5
e. volunteering my time helping people in need.	2.6	2.7
f. giving 3% or more of my income to help those in need.	2.4	2.3
g. finding a career that provides the opportunity to be helpful to others or useful to society.	3.1	3.1
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?		
h. Adults should give some times for the good of their community or country.	4.1	4.4
I. Having an impact on the world is within the reach of most individuals.	3.6	3.8
j. Most misfortunes that occur to people are frequently the result of circumstances beyond their control.	2.8	3.2
k. If I could change one thing about society, it would be to achieve greater social justice.	3.5	3.7
l. I can learn from prison inmates.	3.2	3.6
m. I make quick judgments about homeless people.	2.3	2.4
n. Individuals should be ready to inhibit their own pleasures if these inconvenience others.	2.9	2.9
o. People, regardless of whether they have been successful or not, ought to help those in need.	3.7	4.0
p. People ought to help those in need as a "payback" for their own opportunities, fortunes, and successes.	2.4	2.7
q. If I had been born in poverty, chances are that I would not be attending this college.	3.8	4.0
r. I feel that I can make a difference in the world.	4.1	4.3

Note: Items a-g offer responses on a 4 point scale - "not important"(1) to "essential"(4). Items h- r offer responses on a 5 point scale - "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). Paired *t* tests comparing pre- and postscores found no significant differences on any of the items.

[9] Items reported in Table I and II are from a questionnaire developed by Jeffrey Howard and Wilbert McKeachie at the Office of Community Service Learning at the University of Michigan. My thanks to Jeff Howard and Greg Markus for their permission to use the questionnaire.

My results, in the end however, did not confirm the hypothesis. As Table 1 shows, although there were changes in the mean scores of students in the public policy course, paired *t* - tests on pre- and post-course scores found no statistically significant differences on any items. In even my experimental group, I could find no significant change in student belief orientations or attitudes as a result of participation in the course. For these students, no aspect of the course, including the community service, seemed to make a significant difference in their personal values and beliefs. (Needless to say, a similar absence of change was found in the European politics courses.) These results offer a sobering lesson in the limited impact this teacher's work had on his students last semester.

While these results do not offer objective evidence that service-learning changes student beliefs and values in a civic minded direction, several factors may account for why hypothesized changes were so small. First, the small changes that do occur, although not statistically significant, are all in the direction of more concern for others and making a difference in ones community. On every item, a small number of students did seem to change their attitudes in the direction of more civic minded attitudes. Second, the pre-test reveals a group of students who were already quite civic minded and concerned with serving their communities when they started the course. To begin with these were already students who agreed that "adults should work for the good of their community", "help those in need", and "make a difference in the world". They believed in "working toward equal opportunity for all citizens", "becoming involved...to improve my community", and "volunteering my time helping people in need". As a group of students already embracing the beliefs and values service-learning is supposed to promote, it should not be surprising that only small change was possible in a civic minded direction. Finally, seventeen of

the thirty-two students in this group were seniors destined to graduate at the end of the semester (thirteen were juniors and two sophomores). It is reasonable to think that students in their last semester of their college experience would have developed rather stable attitudes in regard to the items in this questionnaire. Service-learning might have made more of a difference with younger students just beginning their college experience.

Table II offers an additional insight into this negative result. While the survey found no significant attitude change among these students, this objective result does not seem to correspond to the students' own perception of how the course affected their beliefs and values. As compared to the students in my European politics class, the public policy students perceived the course to have increased or strengthened orientations on all items. (These questions were asked only on the post-course survey.) While the differences between the classes may reflect differences in course subject matter as well as the service component, my suspicion is that the service component is a major factor. Issues of social responsibility, social justice, civic renewal, and concern for community are addressed in my European politics class as they were in the public policy class. For example, Robert Putnam's book, *Making Democracy Work* - describing the importance of civic institutions for democracy in Italy, was required reading in the European politics course and discussed over a two week period with specific comparisons to the United States[10]. The large difference between the classes may be related to the presence of community service in the public policy course. While service-learning may not have changed significantly the actual attitudes and beliefs of students in the course, my public policy students discerned,

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[10]Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993).

themselves, a change in their orientation as a result of the course.

Table II: *Comparison of Mean Student Perception of Course Impact on Attitude and Value Change in European Politics and Public Policy Classes*

Attitude or Value	European Class	Public Policy Class
Indicate the degree to which participation in this course has increased or strengthened your:		
intention to serve others in need.	1.6	2.9
intention to give to charity.	1.5	2.6
sense of purpose or direction in life.	1.8	2.2
orientation toward others and away from yourself.	2.0	2.7
intention to work on behalf of social justice.	1.6	2.6
belief that helping those in need is one's social responsibility.	1.9	2.8
belief that one can make a difference in the world.	1.9	2.5
understanding of the role of external forces as shapers of the individual.	2.6	3.0
tolerance and appreciation of others.	2.6	3.1

Note: Response options were a 4 point scale from "not at all" (1) to "a great deal". One-tailed tests revealed significant differences between the means of all the items at, at least, the .05 level..

My Perceptions of Service-learning's Impact on the Course

Service-learning made this past semester's *American Public Policy* different from any of the previous twenty times I have taught it and, in my estimation, made it better. Like my students, I perceived that the service component made a difference in what students learned. My post-course assessment is that students did connect their service experience well to the concepts and public policy issues we discussed. Throughout the semester, I found the student service experiences a useful tool for raising questions, opening avenues of analysis, and offering illustrations of points I wanted to make in class. Most importantly, however, the service experience seemed to empower students by making them "experts" on, at least, a portion of the material discussed in class. Because students were in contact with the people or concerns the policies we were discussing intended to address, they found they possessed first hand knowledge

with which to react to the policy debate. Policy issues that had been remote and abstract in previous classes engaged these students on a much more personal level. I believe that the service experience was the key to making this happen.

Repeatedly during the course of the semester, I sensed students raising questions and issues with a sort of confidence and decisiveness that I have not experienced in previous public policy classes. This sense of empowerment came through especially in two ways: first, in the quality of daily class discussion - student engagement and involvement in discussion was the best I have experienced; and, second, in the quality of the term papers students submitted. I will discuss, first, how I found service-learning to have affected discussion of three policy areas: education, immigration, and welfare. Second, I will describe how I found student papers to be different from those submitted in previous public policy classes.

As with previous semesters, the course focused on issues of equal educational opportunity in our discussion of education policy. Jonathan Kozol's *Savage Inequalities*, with its dramatic and eloquent accounts of schooling in resource poor districts, is an excellent vehicle for raising these issues. Last semester, students tutoring at Ezek Hopkins found much in their experience to confirm Kozol's account, but also used their experience to analyze it critically.

Prior to reading the book, students raised the issue of social class difference in their discussion of their service experience. Coming from upper middle class backgrounds, they had noticed early on the contrast between their own experiences in suburban, predominately white, public or private schools and what they observed in an ethnically diverse urban public school. They perceived a different and more impoverished educational atmosphere than they remembered from their own schools. Many comments were made about that lack of discipline and order in the

school and absence of serious work going on in classrooms. They said the sixth and seventh grade students they were tutoring were working on math concepts they remembered covering in third and fourth grade in their own schools. Even before we got to Kozol, they were describing their experience in terms of class inequality.

After reading the book, the students brought up their service experience as confirming much of what Kozol described. At the same time, they drew on their experience to raise critical questions about his analysis. Most significantly, they found little to support Kozol's emphasis on differences in school resources as the source of educational inequality. While they were convinced that the quality of education a Ezek Hopkins was inferior, they saw little evidence of a lack of resources. The school was in good physical condition (it had recently been completely renovated) and students seemed to have ample books and other materials with which to work. Rather than lack of school resources, my students brought up the social gulf between the middle class white teachers at the school and their pupils. Several of my students reported witnessing teachers directing abusive language at children, and their encounters with teachers left them with the impression that the teachers were largely apathetic and dismissive of the potential of those they were teaching.

While my students perception of ample resources and abusive teachers at the school may not have been completely accurate, it led our class discussion on education policy in productive directions. Students used their experience as a springboard to seek other explanations, besides resource inequalities, to account for their service observations. They brought up issues such as teacher recruitment and training, school district organization and administration, school politics, and the segregation of the poor in central cities. Because students had a chance to learn about the

chaotic home lives of some of the children they tutored and how that seemed to affect their learning, they began to think and discuss education policy in relation to broader social issues, such as growing income inequality, and the relationship with other policies, such as economic and welfare policies. Compared to my previous experience, this class explored educational issues more thoroughly and with greater sophistication. Having students in the class with direct experience with a public school made all the difference.

Students were able to bring their service experience to bear, in a similar way, when we discussed immigration policy. I organized discussion of this issue around a National Issues Forum booklet on the issue that offered three alternative policy "choices" on the issue.[11] After reading the booklet, the class deliberated about the alternatives and sought a consensus on a policy option. Student service with recent immigrants had significant impact when we discussed the option that focused on immigration as a threat to cultural unity. Rather than accept readily the claim that recent immigrants clung to their ethnic identity and refused to embrace American values, the students who had become acquainted with Southeast Asian children in the after school program offered numerous anecdotes about the "American-ness" of the children - in their dress, games, musical tastes, and English language ability. At the same time, several students reported talking with the children about the children's home life, cultural traditions, and religion. They found the children seemed to be integrating well into the American cultural mainstream while participating, at the same time, in their families' traditional cultures.

Service-learning seemed to have a major impact on how last semester's public policy class

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[11]National Issues Forum Institute, *Admission Decisions: Should Immigration Be Restricted* (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1994). These booklets are intended for use by community groups to promote citizen deliberation on public issues.

discussed welfare policy. To a greater extent than other policy issues, students in previous classes had addressed welfare policy in ideological terms and students always divided on this issue along ideological lines. This past semester, given the attention to the new emphasis on welfare reform in the Republican's "Contract With America", students were intensely interested in welfare and, initially as in the past, approached it in largely ideological terms with the class conservatives praising Republican proposals and the liberals deriding them.

Interestingly, the welfare interview service option attracted some of the most ideological liberals *and* conservatives in the class. For both, as they made clear in class discussion, coming in contact with some actual welfare recipients caused them to modify the stance their ideologies dictated. While their general predispositions remained the same, the students became very critical of the terms in which the public debate was held and found they had to rethink the assumptions underlying their own predispositions. For conservatives, talking with AFDC recipients destroyed their assumption that recipients were lazy and happy about living on the dole. In their journals, several remarked on their surprise at how bright and resourceful the women they talked to were. In their final papers, several of the conservative students, while not rejecting the punitive approach of the Personal Responsibility Act altogether, argued for softening it with provisions for support for job training, child care, and mentoring programs. The more liberal students in this group became more critical of the welfare system as a result of their welfare interviews. Perhaps because of their reading of Piven and Cloward, these students were impressed with the demeaning, stigmatizing, and controlling character of welfare as revealed in their discussions with AFDC recipients.

One of the most interesting discussions of welfare policy during the semester occurred as a

result of observations of students serving at the soup kitchen, Amos House. After several weeks of service, the students expressed surprise that they observed primarily men coming for meals. Talking about why this might be the case led to a discussion of the structure of the income support system in the United States and the near absence of basic income support for single men and women without children. Like many states, Rhode Island has recently effectively eliminated General Public Assistance leaving no source of income for those without children. In following up our discussion, students talked with Amos House staff about how GPA cutbacks had increased the number of people coming for meals. In addition, they began to learn that some of those who came for meals had jobs, some of them full time, but came to Amos House as a supplement to their low wages. As a result of these discussions, as in the case of our discussion of education policy, students were able to place the analysis of welfare policy in a larger context of growing income inequality, declining wages, and increasing poverty in America.

Finally, along with empowering students as "experts" in class discussion, service-learning helped them to write better papers and exams by empowering them to become claim ownership of their own words. In my experience, undergraduate's do not, typically, look on their course writing as something that belongs to them. Papers and exams are exercises undertaken at the behest of professors. The result is an artificiality of tone and absence of sincere commitment to the ideas expressed. Usually, papers in my public policy course reflected this context. The papers this past semester were different. In style and tone, they seemed to express the students' genuine commitment to what was written and desire to communicate about the service experience. Perhaps because they could claim ownership of their service experience, the students could assert ownership of what they wrote in their papers. Unlike the typical term paper in which students

merely synthesize the ideas of others, these papers drew on experiences unique to the writers and this improved immensely, in comparison to previous papers in this course, the quality of the work I read. While the paper and exam assignments required students to draw on course readings and their own additional library research, the link to the service experience seemed to give students ground upon which to think of what they wrote as their own.

Conclusion

Having had the experience of using a service-learning component in *American Public Policy*, I cannot conceive of teaching the course again without it. Although my attempt to measure change in student beliefs and values as a result of service-learning did not indicate the kind of impact found in earlier studies, I perceived a substantial positive difference in the quality of the course. Service-learning made the course different and, I believe, better than the previous times I have taught it. Students did bring insights from their service experience into our classroom discussion of public policy. These insights allowed more enthusiastic, engaged, and informed discussion that I have experienced in other classes.

Service-learning fit very well into my public policy course; it might not fit as well in other kinds of political science courses. Identifying service experience relevant to public policy issues was quite easy. Finding appropriate service sites in a course in political theory or comparative politics might be more difficult. Yet, with some creativity, service-learning can probably contribute to teaching many political science subjects. Next semester, one of my Providence College colleagues will include a service component in his course on "Law and Society". Another colleague plans to introduce a service component in a Latin American politics course. (In the

latter course, student service will be with recent Latin American immigrants to Providence.) Even for those courses that do not seem as obviously suited to service-learning as public policy, my experience would lead me to recommend trying to develop an appropriate service-learning component in any course where it might be feasible.

As I argued in the last section, the most important contribution of service-learning to student learning in my course was through the way it seemed to empower students. Such empowerment may occur especially at institutions, like mine, with student bodies recruited from eighteen to twenty-two year olds. In my experience, one learning obstacle such students face is their youth; that is, their relative lack of life experience against which they can analyze and judge the material they encounter in the classroom. I notice this when I teach older students who do have such life experience and draw on it constantly in evaluating course material. Last semester, I discovered that community service gave my young students a quick and concentrated dose of life experience, their own and that of those they served. They used this experience in thinking about public policy. The result was a class of more mature and more empowered learners who gave this teacher one of the most satisfying teaching experiences of his career.[12]

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[12]I would like to thank my colleague Robert Trudeau for reading and commenting on an earlier draft of this paper and my colleague James Carlson for advising on and assisting with the data analysis.